

Love Bugs

'How can I tell the created from the uncreated,' MAP asked.

He wasn't quite sure if the question had any validity or not. Analysts at the bio-labs insisted that there was a new breed of Subverter indistinguishable from human kind and with a 'hidden purpose'. It was his job to discover what that might be. But first he had to learn as much about this secret enemy as he could:

'Any quirks, quarks, habits or imperfections?'

The bio-analyst levelled ice-blue eyes and spoke, coldly clear, precisely accurate.

'They forget to blink sometimes,' he momentarily pulled down the blinds on his own expressionless orbs, 'they have a tendency to repeat themselves...repeat...themselves,' he droned mechanically; and, of course, they don't fuck. They have the equipment, naturally,' he continued; or rather, unnaturally,' sky cool marbles permitted themselves a brief twinkle presumably designed to simulate merriment, 'these bods were grown in synth vats rather than Subverter host-wombs like the rest of that demon-spawn,' a dark cloud of remembered pain passed swiftly across the cerulean imperiousness of his previously untroubled gaze, 'but they lack the *appetite*,' he licked his lips significantly, 'that is,' he went on suddenly warming to the subject, 'their makers forgot to include socio-sexual conditioning when they sent them to school on the Hive-planet...'

'They don't fuck. But they can. Is that what you're saying?'

'My meaning was understandable I think,' obsidian points of no-light floating on a tranquil sea, 'sex is *learnt* and nobody bothered to tell them about it.'

'What about the emotive centre?'

'Dormant.'

'Not dead, just sleeping, eh?'

'I don't quite see the distinction.'

'Trust me. There is one.' MAP strode across the tiled lab floor, paused perfunctorily before the door's servo-mechanism, watched as the wall's opacity became suddenly gaseous and - disappeared?

'Welcome aboard Colonel!' A rooky Stardropper MAP noted, only one golden sun on the fresh-faced Marine's epaulets.

'Thank you son. Ready for the Drop?' It always made the youngsters feel a bit special if he took an interest - so he did.

'Thank you sir. Of course but...' the boyish grin faded for a moment before returning magnified a thousandfold 'we're happy to have *you* aboard, sir!'

MAP strode down the ship's corridor in the direction of his work cube. It always made him feel special, boosting men's confidence just by his presence - a bit wearing though. That spacer's gleaming smile following him down F-deck. He'd never seen so many teeth in one head before. The boy must be an Osmond, one of the genetically inbred Rabidic Mormons, an Old Earth religious sect and one of the first casualties of the *diaspora* when the planet of their choice (the planet of the chosen they called it - quite *literally* too, they'd Christened it 'Chosen I') was reduced to cosmic dust by a Subverter-inspired solar rupture. The Osmond clan, an extended family of missionaries using their inherited facility for music-making to attract converts in a neighbouring solar system, were the only ones to survive the genocide. Now they dedicated their sons and daughters to the Drop. None of the band had played a note since. There were rumours that they sometimes practised without their music-making tools, silently, like mimes, and there was something else too. They were said to be developing a new instrument, presumably to celebrate that time when there would no longer be sufficient denizens of the Hive-planet to generate a Swarm.

Arriving at his destination, MAP tried to throw an encouraging wink at his still-smiling subordinate. 'Be damned,' he breathed. Reactive to moving body heat, the glow tubes in the ceiling had reverted to preparatory mode, but MAP could still see the brilliant smile of his new friend shining like a lightship's beacon at journey's end. 'has to be a member of the Rabidic Chapter,' he muttered to himself as he keyed in his PIN, 'who else would use fluorescent white paint on their teeth.'

Stepping rapidly through his cube's momentarily dilating portal, MAP used his cyborg component to scan the small space for anomalies. Acceptable levels of paranoia catered to, he eased into a facsimile of a priceless antique from Ancient Terria - a Flintstone's bean bag (mammoth size) - and heaved a grateful sigh. Those ground-to-ship jumps were always tiring, even if the teleport systems were functioning at optimum level (and his internal monitoring equipment would have warned him if the one Earthside hadn't been), but for some reason this had been especially taxing.

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The convenience factor was, he reflected, no compensation for brain damage. He could afford to lose a few million - the chips in his head would always compensate - but your average Marine...ten maybe twelve jumps before the psych techs graded you 'Unfit for Active Service' and gave you a one-way ticket to anywhere (which, for a Space Marine used to travelling between galaxies in no-time, amounted to *nowhere*).

MAP needed sleep more than he knew. Always striving for humanness, aware of the diurnal aspect of human consciousness, the technoid architects of his 'borg hemisphere had programmed this left-hand side of his mind to fulfil its compensatory regenerating function in 'snooze mode'. MAP slept.

'Good Morning Colonel.'

'Uunnhff.'

'It's the 23rd of the month of March in the year 2437...and it's a beauty-full daaaay!'

'Yaaarghhh!'

MAP reached for his cube's joy globe. Sculpted in green and black bio-plas, it was designed to look like a Subverter Hive-egg and be hurled at the nearest available hard surface when it 'hatched' - like now.

'Shutthefuckup!'

'Wakey wakey! Rise and shine sir!'

'Wha...?'

MAP's sleep-befogged part-mind couldn't quite grasp the situation. He'd made the necessary manouveres:

- 1) Locate source of annoying sound -an egg, that is, Happy Radio FM.
- 2) Grab offensive noisy object.
- 3) Smash the bloody thing by bringing it into violent contact with something solid - in this case the top of his skull.

Q.E.D.? Apparently not.

'Sun's up! Well, several actually. If you'd care to take a look out of your cube's view port, sir...' MAP groaned inwardly. He must've been assigned an orderly.

'Should've put a DND signal into the compsole.'

'Sorry sir?'

'Do NOT Disturb!' MAP roared.

'Yes sir. I see sir. Will there be anything else sir?'

MAP, about to get out of bed and either take a shower or decapitate a disorderly orderly, threw aside his coverlet - and immediately either regretted it or didn't. It sort of depended...

'Will that be all sir?'

'I'm not sure. I have a small (well, rather large actually) problem. Would you come over here and take a look at it for me please?'

'Of course sir.'

MAP pointed to the problem - and waited.

'What's wrong sir?'

'Can't you deal with it?'

'I suppose so sir. If you tell me what you want me to do with it sir.'

Oh no, not one of *those*. Twittering pseudo-virgins were always a pain in the arse. Still it might be fun to turn the situation around and become a pain in...

'Would you like to take a closer look?'

The orderly bent closer, eyes staring unblinkingly, whether in wonder, homage, or genuine bemusement MAP didn't know - or care much.

'A closer look? Closer look?'

'What are you? A parrot? Come closer.'

'Closer. Closer.'

'Yes, dammit! Closer!'

The orderly bent further, eyes seemingly rivetted to MAP's groin, mouth open in unfeigned perplexity and incomprehension. MAP reached up with his left hand and took hold of the lackey's lapel. With the other he

grasped a handful of blonde curls and forcibly brought a somewhat surprised mouth to meet his. Pushing tongue between unresisting lips and teeth he proceeded to give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation in the hope of awakening what would appear to be a lifeless corpse - at least in *that* area. After a rigorous oral examination, the orderly seemed to awaken to what was expected. Mouth met erection and slid inexorably down the shaft, widened to swallow MAP's swollen testes...

'Uuunnnhhhh.'

MAP scratched a spot on his forearm, kicking in his invisibility suit's laser system, made a sweeping gesture with his hand in front of the girl's bobbing head - and kicked. The trunk of the orderly's body fell backwards onto plush white pile, spouting a fountain of gore. The head, eyes still wide in unfeigned amazement dripped softly crimson and, as MAP stood, flipped slowly, like a bodiless diver on the highboard. The tip of MAP's cock burned an angry red.

'That was a close shave. Close shave,' he droned mechanically.

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The Chief of Security remained impassively impervious until MAP chose to indicate the cause of his disturbance.

'Boy or girl,' the woman enquired while salaciously noting MAP's dishevelled appearance.

'What's the difference?'

'Just for the record Colonel,' bottle-green eyes narrowing to slits. 'One of *those* - huh.'

MAP turned to the Ship-to-Earth communication console.

'Ship. Send a message. Begin. Marine Central. C-in-C. Subject. Subverter. New Breed. Programmed to kill when aroused. Sexually aroused, that is. Arousal has to be forced. Probable targets. Space Marines on shore leave. Message ends. MAP.'

'Oh, one of *those* huh?'

Something warm and wet embraced his still-aching stiffness, moving slowly with deliberation.

'Sure you're not a new breed of Subverter?'

'Huh?'